

CANCUN

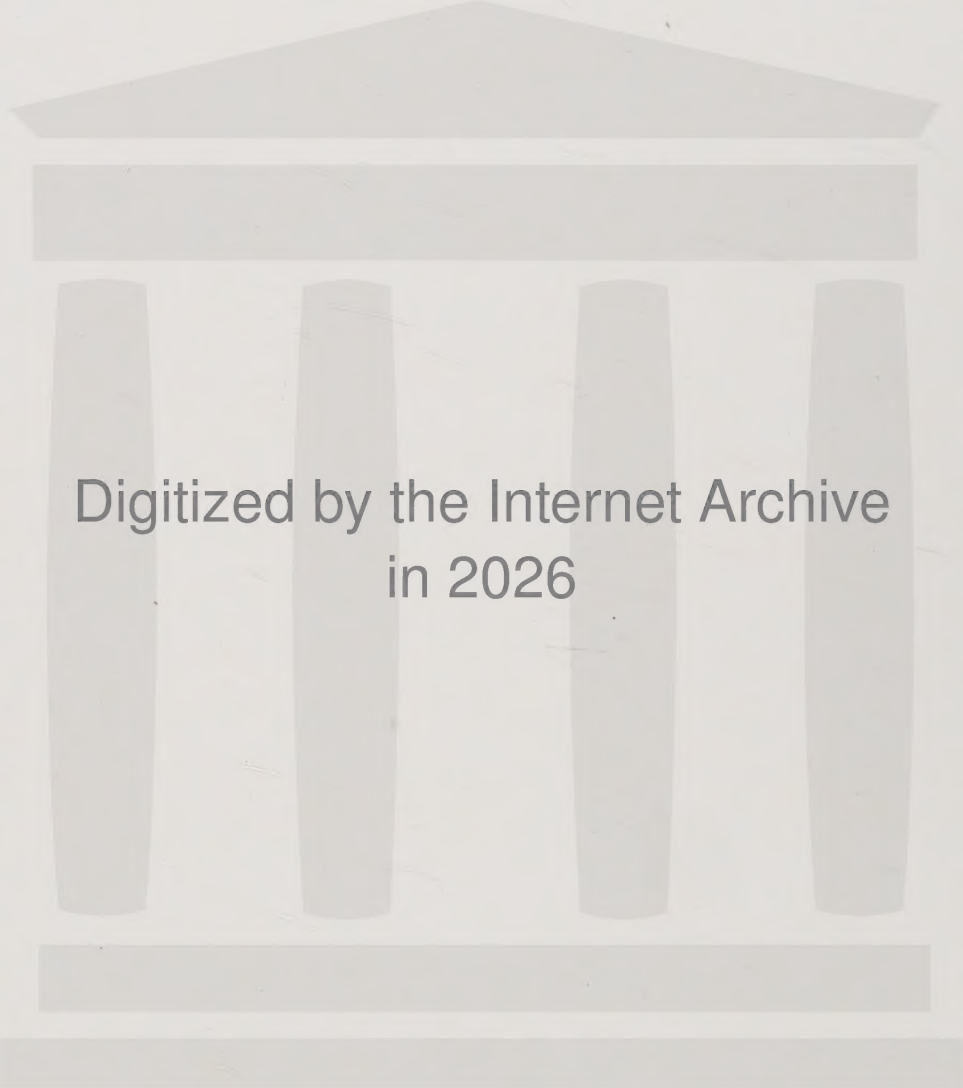
COZUMEL · ISLA MUJERES · TULUM

ENGLISH EDITION



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CANCUN

COZUMEL-ISLA MUJERES-TULUM



148 Colour illustrations

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INTRODUCTION

It is almost impossible to talk of the State of Quintana Roo on the Yucatán Peninsula, Mexico, without going back to its glorious past: the Maya culture and the vast knowledge acquired by its people; the amazing calculations of time made by its priests; the luxury associated with its rulers and the magnificence of their palaces, temples, stelae and paintings that have been preserved down the centuries, silent guardians of ancient secrets. But there are also remains of later, colonial times that remind us of the frequent attacks by pirates in the 17th and 18th centuries. Greedy for booty, they ravaged the coasts of the Mexican Caribbean attacking Spanish galleons loaded with precious goods from the colonies in Central and South America.

Quintana Roo is a young state with an age old culture that in the space of twenty years has undergone amazing transformation and growth. This is all the more surprising when we remember that only three decades ago it was an almost inaccessible region, sparsely populated and known mainly for chicle gathering.

Its recent establishment as a Free and Sovereign State comes as a result of a series of historical events beginning in the 19th century. This was a difficult period for Mexico, with the War of Independence; the War against the United States that ended with Mexico losing more than half of its territory; the French intervention, and the War of the Castes that involved Quintana Roo and the State of Yucatán.

The border between Mexico and Belize was established in 1893. At this time Quintana Roo was part of the State of Yucatán, which had very unstable relations with the Central Government. This, and the state's ambition to secede led to Yucatán's territory being reduced. And so, on January 16, 1902 Quintana Roo was officially established as a Territory of the Federation, covering an area of 50,843 square kilometers. The capital, at first Santa Cruz de Bravo, was transferred to Payo Obispo shortly afterward.

In 1913 the Territory was reunited with the State of Yucatán, but recovered its rights that same year. In 1931, the Government divided it between Yucatán and Campeche, and only the islands of Holbox, Mujeres and Cozumel continued to be administered as a separate entity. In 1935, Quintana Roo was once again made a Territory of the Federation, and one year later the name of the capital was changed from Payo Obispo to Ciudad Chetumal. It was finally raised to the rank of Free and Sovereign State of Mexico in 1974. The name of the former Federal Territory of Quintana Roo honors a leading ideologist of National Independence and founder of the Republic, Andrés Quintana Roo.

The Caribbean sea is world famous for its special qualities. Research into geomorphology, oceanography, marine biology and underwater archaeology has provid-

ed detailed descriptions: beaches of fine, white sand backed by luxuriant tropical vegetation; reefs of enormous coral banks; islands and lagoons, some of them nature reserves; warm waters that play host to an immense variety of incredibly beautiful sea creatures — some of them unique in the world; and its waters that run the full range of tones from blue to green. All this makes the Caribbean, especially the Mexican Caribbean, one of the most beautiful seas on earth.

This marine paradise is also the ideal place for most water sports, especially along the Quintana Roo coast. And this is where one of the biggest hotel and world tourist zones has been developed stretching from Yucatán to the border with Belize. Quintana Roo is culture, history, civilization and modern life; but it is also sea, islands, lagoons and tropical forest, all combining into an unforgettable memory.





QUINTANA ROO AND THE MAYA CULTURE

Nearly 12 centuries ago, a territory which covers approximately 325,000 square kilometers saw the birth of the most refined and highly developed civilization in pre-Hispanic America. The lands that form the present-day states of Quintana Roo, Yucatán, Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas were inhabited by the Mayas, who also settled in what are now Guatemala, El Salvador and Be-

lize. Thus, they occupied three geographical areas: the plains of Yucatán in the north; the rain forest of Petén and the basins of the Usumacinta, Grijalva and Motagua rivers in the center; the highlands of Guatemala and Honduras in the south.

The Maya culture grew to splendor thanks to rigid stratification. The top of the social pyramid was occupied by the noble, priestly and military classes, who held absolute power over the lower classes, i.e. artisans, peasants and slaves. This form of organization allowed for — and in a way demanded — highly refined art forms that were expressed in architecture, whose most imposing examples in Quintana Roo are to be found at Tulum, Coba and Kohunlich; in the sculpture and paintings that usually decorate temples and palaces; and in minor arts such as pottery, weaving and featherwork and other Maya “luxury” crafts that still cause admiration in museums today.

One of the most important Maya accomplishments was the use of a symbol to represent the idea of zero by giving a particular value to figures according to their position. The Old World had to wait until the 7th century for Hindu mathematicians to arrive at the concept of zero in a decimal system.

Another extraordinary achievement was the precise measurement of time. Modern astronomy has established that the tropical year is 365.2422 days long; the ancient Mayas calculated it at 365.2420 days, with an extraordinarily high degree of precision.

Ruins of Maya religious and commercial centers dot the beautiful coasts of the Mexican Caribbean.

View of the hotel area in Cancún, between the Caribbean Sea and the Lagoon of Nichupté.







Above left. The modern hotels of Punta Cancún.

The Camino Real Hotel overlooks the sea at the far end of Punta Cancún.

Below left. Punta Cancún, with the Conference Center in the foreground.

CANCUN

Cancún's fame for beauty is well deserved and has a long, tradition, but it was not until 1970 that modern Mexico's biggest resort complex began to grow, transforming Cancún (in the Maya language "Pot of Snakes") into one of the most attractive resorts in the world. The island of Cancún was inhabited in the post-Classic period (1200 - 1519), chosen for the products its sea could offer. Turtles provided both meat and shells, which were used for several different purposes; sharks were hunted as food and their teeth used as offerings; conch and other shellfish were either eaten or traded. The inhabitants' skill in fishing and in extracting salt enabled them to establish regular trade with other

regions that provided the jade, obsidian, gold and copper that have been found in the area.

Although Cancún must have been known to many travelers in ancient times the first known written reference to it was made by the English captain Richard Owen. In the first half of the 19th century, he was interested by the freshwater wells where fishermen drew supplies. The pre-Hispanic buildings were first noticed by John Stephens in 1865; he probably saw the temples at Punta Cancún, the temple of Vamilum on the coast, the one at San Miguel, built on the dunes, and those at Punta Nizuc.

In 1878 Alicia and Auguste Le Plongeon described the



Panoramic view of the Sheraton Hotel and its ample beach.



The architecture of the Sheraton Hotel was inspired by pre-Hispanic pyramids.

Above right. The beach and sea from Sheraton Towers.

Below right. The original architecture of the Marriot Hotel.

Following pages. A panoramic view of Punta Cancún with its hotels and beaches.









The Royal Mayan and Omni Cancún Hotels.

Above right. Another tourist paradise in Cancún: the Oasis Hotel.

ruins of Nizuc-Te, now known as “Del Rey”, and William H. Holmes, sailing on the Lagoon of Nichupte in 1895 described a site “with many stone buildings”, now called the archaeological site of San Miguelito.

Cancún has undergone surprising growth, not only in the magnificent hotel area where the most famous international chains are represented, but also in urban structure: avenues such as the Paseo Kukulcan, with its full-sized reproductions of sculptures from various Mesoamerican cultures; shopping centers, sports and entertainment centers, and a museum.

Below right. The splendid architecture of the Melia Cancún hotel.





A mixture of styles: the Solaris Resort, Royal Solaris and Suites Las Brisas Hotels.



The name Melía Turquesa suggests the color of the Caribbean.

Above right. The magnificent architecture of the Hyatt Cancún Caribe Hotel.

Below right. The Fiesta Americana Condesa with its enormous thatched umbrellas which bring to mind other exotic locations.





Playa Linda, an ideal setting for the Acumarina Beach Hotel.



A trip on the calm waters of the Lagoon of Nichupté.



*The Club Méditerranée dominating
Punta Nizuc.*



*The Fiesta American Hotel
and Caracol beach.*





The Cancún Golf Club occupies an exceptional site between the Caribbean and the Lagoon of Nichhupté.

Left. The blue waters of Punta Nizuc enhance the white buildings of the Club Méditerranée.



Punta Nizuc is a popular rendezvous for windsurfers.





Main entrance of the Cancún Convention Center.

Above left. The Hyatt Regency Hotel, a landmark in Punta Cancún.

Below left. Nature's gift to Cancún is the spectacular setting, one of the most beautiful on earth.



Lively shopping streets surround Plaza Caracol.





Cancún's modern hotels form a backdrop for water sports.

Above left. Nothing matches a game at Cancún's Golf Club overlooking the sea.

Below left. White sand, crystal clear sea and thatched umbrellas, permanent features of Cancún.



Windsurfing on the Lagoon of Nichupté.



A parachute trip is always exciting.



Beaches and sea - a permanent invitation.

Above right. Resting under a palm-tree after a swim in the Caribbean.

Below right. A walk along Cancún's beaches can be come a social event.







After a busy day sports craft bob peacefully at a pier on the Lagoon of Nichupté.

Above left. The Lagoon of Nichupté, somewhere truly exceptional.

Below left. Sunset from one of the jetties on the lagoon.



A magnificent Caribbean sunset.





El Rey owes its name to the sculpture of a high-ranking Maya found on the site.

Above left. A late post-Classic Maya shrine on the grounds of the Sheraton Hotel.

Below left. One of the squares at El Rey, the largest archaeological site in Cancún.



Caribbean palms grace the monuments of El Rey.





Cruise ships anchored in the transparent waters of the Mexican Caribbean.

Above left. Watersports are always a pleasure in the Caribbean.

Below left. Skin diving is the best way to discover the beauties of the sea.



The hawksbill turtle, a permanent resident of the Caribbean.





Above left. Maya huts in rural areas have changed little since pre-Hispanic times.

The Yucatan Peninsula is also known as the "Land of deer and pheasants" because these animals are so common.

Below left. Maya country-women dressed in the traditional "huipil" preparing "tortillas" just as their ancestors did.

THE MAYA ANIMAL WORLD

The Mayas regarded animals as the symbols of natural forces, cosmic levels, time, life forces, and death. According to the Mayas, the cosmic elements were often represented by animals. Thus, earth, sky and water were associated with certain reptiles or diurnal birds; the bowels of the earth were symbolized by birds of prey, nocturnal birds or the fearsome jaguar, which was worshiped as a god because of the belief that it embodied a divine spirit. Other animals were associated with constellations. Gemini was called Ac-Ek, the "Turtle Star"; Scorpio

was Zin-Aan-Ek, the "Scorpion Star". The planet Venus was associated with wasps, and known as Xux-Ek, the "Wasp Star", and the Sun was often represented as a human body with a macaw's head. Birds were very important for the Mayas, particularly those with showy plumage. Some were kept in captivity to take advantage of their natural molt; others were taken alive then set free again to reproduce after their most valuable feathers had been removed. Common species provided food and their plumage was occasionally used to decorate clothing. As the forefathers of man, incarnations of a part of the human soul and mediators between humans and the gods, animals were protected by Izamná.



View of the archaeological site of San Miguelito near Cancún town with the forest and the Lagoon of Nichupté.



Iguanas, some reaching considerable size, are typical Quintana Roo wildlife.



Though caymans can be found in the wild, there are several protected hatcheries in Quintana Roo.



Macaws and parrots are only two of the many species of birds in the Mexican Caribbean.



Thatched umbrellas, sea and palm trees mean complete relaxation.



A cannon in Akumal. These relics of colonial times can be seen at several places in Quintana Roo.

Above right: The brilliant flame tree lights up the region.

Below right: The hibiscus, one of the Caribbean's many beautiful flowers.





Water skiing against a background of tropical vegetation.



Deep-sea fishing, another great attraction because of the many different species in the Caribbean.

Right. Crystal clear water, imposing coral reefs and multicolored fish make skin diving the most popular sport in the Caribbean.





Luxury cruise ship at anchor off Playa del Carmen. Tourists visiting the Mexican Caribbean can enjoy both natural beauty and archaeological sites.



Playa del Carmen. Local children playing in the safe, warm waters.

Above right. The modern ferry "México" links Playa del Carmen and Cozumel.

Below right. Playa del Carmen, the departure point for the island of Cozumel.





Xcaret, surrounded by palms. Nature and remains of the Maya civilization.



The temples at Xcaret date back to the post-Classic.

Above right. Present-day Mayas walking along the beach of Xcaret, just as their ancestors did.

Below right. The open sea off Paamul beach.





Tropical vegetation frames Chemuyil beach.



Turtles lay their eggs on the beaches of Xcacel, where the species is protected.

Above right. Puerto Aventuras on the Caribbean coast is an example of Quintana Roo's development.

Below right. Yacht basin at Puerto Aventuras.







Above left. The sea at Akumal is calm and warm all year round.

Above left. Akumal beach. Sky, sea and sun in perfect harmony.

Below left. This colonial cannon seems to be protecting the beach of Akumal, attacked by pirates in the past.

THE MEXICAN CARIBBEAN COAST

The marine origin of animal life awakens in us a complex series of sensations: man exploits the sea, and at the same time feels an irresistible attraction to it, a passionate curiosity, and enormous respect. There are numerous beaches in other parts of the world, but it would be difficult to find one with all the features of the Caribbean beaches of Quintana Roo.

Many documentaries and reports have focused on the reefs of this area, especially Palancar, off Cozumel. This, one of the largest reefs in the world, is a veritable underwater mountain stretching ten kilometers under calm, crystal-clear waters.

Reefs build on rocks, where the dead parts of coral atoms - invertebrates made up of a living part (polyp) and a dead part (polypary) - form deposits in warm (over 18° C), shallow, uncontaminated water. The weight of deposited material pushes down the rock base, but because the process is so slow, coral colonies can continue to enlarge the reef. Coral reefs, which take 25 years to grow about one meter, are ecosystems for molluscs, crustaceans, fish and a wide variety of microscopic algae that feed the coral. The coastal lagoons of Quintana Roo, such as Bacalar, are another attraction, each one with its special charm but all sharing a common feature: beauty.

There are lakes surrounded by scrub and pastureland;



Xel-Há was made a National Park to protect its wide variety of wildlife.

Right. The cove of Xel-Há surrounded by low forest and palms is one of the loveliest in the Caribbean and famous for the different colours of its waters.

others are framed by trees and reed-beds alive with animals such as boars, deer, wild turkeys and pheasants; and others are set in forest with abundant wildlife. Some are protected as reserves for tropical birds, but can be visited, and others have preHispanic and colonial ruins on their edges. Skin diving is possible in most of these

lakes. Fine beaches line the large hotel complexes in Cancún, but all along the coast there are quiet, secluded ones and small bays such as Xel-Há, Xcaret, Akumal, Chemuyil, Xcacel and Paamul where the natural beauty of the Caribbean is enhanced by palm groves and luxuriant vegetation.





Panoramic view of Xel-Há.



Swimming and skin diving are a delight in Xel-Há.

Above right. Maya remains make a visit to Xel-Há even more interesting.

Below right. Pre-Hispanic paintings and high-reliefs on display at Xel-Há.





Panoramic view of Tulum. Its cove was a port where many of the goods traded by the Mayas arrived.

Right. El Castillo at Tulum amazed Spanish sailors when they first saw it in the early 16th century.

TULUM

Zamá, which means "Dawn", was probably the ancient name of the city now called Tulum. It was given this name at the beginning of this century by the native members of the troops that General Porfirio Díaz sent to fight against the Mayas in the "War of the Castes". Tulum means "enclosure" or "wall", referring to the large wall that surrounds the city on three sides.

Between 1200 and 1400 it was the most important city on the eastern Caribbean coast because it was the port for the goods that Maya traders brought from the coasts of Central America. In 1511 a Spanish expedition returning to Cuba from the Darién was wrecked off the Caribbean coast; 13 of the 15 survivors were sacrificed. Seven years later the fleet commanded by Juan de Grijalva was amazed by the sight of Tulum. In 1519, when Hernán Cortés set out on the expedition that would end two years later with the conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, he was told in Cozumel that two Span-

iards lived on the mainland, and sent for them immediately. Gonzalo Guerrero and Jerónimo de Aguilar were living in Tulum, the only survivors of the shipwreck in 1511 who had not been sacrificed. Guerrero had adopted Maya life completely: he was a village chief, and married, with children. He was therefore the founder of the first mestizo family on the Yucatán Peninsula, and so refused to join the Spanish forces. Aguilar was a priest and therefore unmarried; he willingly joined the expedition and played an important role as interpreter. The buildings within the city wall are both religious and residential, with the typical features of this region. Temples with walls sloping outward, small altar-like structures, Toltec inspired elements such as columns in the shape of serpents and simple friezes are some of the architectural elements to be seen on this extraordinary site. Standing on the edge of the cliff is the temple known as El Castillo (The Castle), which is the largest





Temple of the Descending God, Tulum. This god, associated with the Sun, is often portrayed on this archaeological site.



Detail of the Temple of the Descending God.

Above right. In 1842 the English artist Frederick Catherwood drew the Castle of Tulum as he saw it on his arrival.

Below right. The building drawn by Catherwood as it is today, cleared of vegetation and reconstructed.

and most strikingly placed building on the site. Its present aspect is the result of several additions and alterations to the original building carried out in the years when Tulum was at its height. Facing the Castle is Building 16, better known as the Templo de los Frescos (Temple of the Frescoes), one of the most architecturally interesting buildings of the Maya post-Classical. The main entrance is formed by four columns, and the decoration on the facade is a niche containing the figure of the Descending God and a molding of stucco flowers.









Preceding pages. Panoramic view of the square of El Castillo in the walled city of Tulum, whose original name was probably "Zamá" (Dawn). The city was at its height in the post-Classic period (800-1500 A.D.).

The Temple of the Frescos is one of Tulum's most outstanding buildings.

Right. Side view of the Temple of the Frescos.

A Maya stele stands in front of the Temple of the Frescos.







Columns beginning in serpents heads frame the upper entrance of the Temple of the Frescos.



Right. The mural painting inside the Temple of the Frescos, in bluish-green on a black background, show offerings of flowers, ears of corn and fruit and also symbolize some gods: Chaac, the god of water and Ix Chel, associated with weaving and the Moon.

Decoration on the side of the Temple of the Frescos. The masks represent a god.







Left. The House of the Columns, also called the Grand Palace was probably Tulum's largest residential building.

The Castle, the largest building in Tulum, stands out against the Caribbean.

The corners of the temple are decorated with large masks, probably representing the god Kukulcán. Although the architecture of this temple is important it is secondary to the exceptional murals inside. These are in bluish green on a black background and depict offerings of flowers, fruit and ears of corn; Chaac, the god of water and a series of goddesses, including Ix Chel, portrayed as an old woman, who personifies the Moon.

The paintings of Tulum show a close relationship with Maya codices, but at the same time have features associated with Mixtec ones. This clearly demonstrates that this city was influenced at a late period in its history by very distant cultures. Another important building is the Temple of the Descending God on the northern side of the Gran Plaza. Its facade is decorated with images of this god, possibly related to the setting Sun. The interior of the temple bears remains of murals showing



House of the Halach Uinik. The ruling class lived in this type of building.



A Descending God decorates the main entrance of the House of the Halach Uinik.

Above right. The House of the Chultún as drawn by Catherwood in 1842. It owes its name to a nearby "chultún", a cistern built by the Mayas to store water.

Below right. The House of the Chultún today.





Palaces, temples and shrines stretch along the coast. Tulum was the most important ceremonial center on the east coast of the Yucatan Peninsula.



Right. Pre-Hispanic monuments against the sunset.

gods, intertwined serpents, the planet Venus, and other symbols associated with water and agriculture. The House of the Chultún, the House of the Columns, the House of the Halach Uinik, temples, shrines, tombs and platforms are all part of the architectural unit enclosed by the city walls, but the ruins of this ancient city extend for several kilometers along the Caribbean coast.







Left. Cobá was one of the most important Maya cities. The Great Pyramid rises from the surrounding forest.

The stairs of the Great Pyramid of Cobá seem to climb towards the gods.

COBÁ

Cobá, which means “water agitated by the wind” became the most important city in the northeast region of the Yucatán Peninsula in its heyday. During this period it occupied an enormous area, with the ceremonial center, numerous dwelling complexes and extensive areas for cultivation. Itself the archaeological site stretches for 6 kilometers.

Situated between two large lakes, Cobá and Macanzoc, the city was linked to many distant places by an extensive network of causeways or “sacbé”. Archaeologists have discovered 42 sacbé so far, the longest of which connects Cobá and Yaxuná, a town near Chichén Itzá, in the State of Yucatán. This great causeway is truly a monumental feat of engineering: 100 kilometers long,

9 meters wide and up to 2.5 meters high on marshy land. A road roller, broken in half, but 4 meters long, 70 centimeters in diameter and weighing 5 tons was found near it. Between 1500 and 700 B.C. Cobá was a farming and fishing village, self-sufficient and growing. Its architecture, created both by the ruling class and different socioeconomic levels of the population, has led archaeologists to suggest that this city grew out of the fusion of various villages in the pre-Classic period.

From the 4th to the 10th century A.D. economic stability in the region strengthened the political power of the leaders, who chose sites near lakes, providing water year-round, for gathering people and resources together. Therefore, housing units become more scattered as they near the center of the city, but at the same time meet more complex architectural requirements so as to blend



Building 1 of the Nohoch Mul Group, Cobá.



Stele 20 of the Nohoch Mul Group with a date read as November 30, 780 A.D.



Building 1, Cobá.



One of the eight stelae of the Macanxoc Group, Cobá.





Left. Tropical vegetation is an ideal setting for the monuments of Cobá.

During the city's heyday temples and residential units occupied a very large area in Cobá.

in with the style of temples and palaces. Cobá contains a large number of stelae that bear dates ranging from the possible foundation of the city in the year 600 B.C. to the 15th century, when the city was finally abandoned. The archaeological site is divided into different complexes. The Cobá Group, consisting of a ball-court, a tunnel roofed with the typical Maya vault, and the main structure, known as La Iglesia (The Church), a pyramid 24 meters high made up of nine sections, with the remains of a temple on the top level. The Nohoch-Mul Group, named for Building 1, is formed by Building 38, one of whose vaults covers an interior space of almost 4 meters, Stele No. 20, the best preserved one at Cobá, bearing a date equivalent to November 30, 780 A.D., and the famous Nohoch-Mul,

a 42-meter high pyramidal base built up of seven sections with rounded corners and crowned by a temple similar in style to those at Tulum.

The "D" Group or Macanxoc stands beside the lake of the same name, surrounded by low forest.

This complex consists of 8 stelae and 9 beautifully carved altars; a large pyramidal base with a stairway leading up to a fully preserved temple whose entrance is divided by a column with a capital that supports a lintel where there are traces of painted number glyphs.

Structure III, at one side of the pyramid just described, has two rows of columns with square capitals.

In the middle of this complex is Stele No. 20, similar in interest and beauty to all the others found at Cobá.



Sian Ka'an biosphere reserve.



Many different species of birds live and breed on the Sian Ka'an reserve.

Above right. The beautiful lagoon of Bacalar is one of the exceptional places in south Quintana Roo.

Below right. The Blue Cenote in Bacalar takes its name from the intense color of its water.







The Government Palace in Chetumal, capital of Quintana Roo, a state with its eyes on the future.

Above left. The fort of San Felipe protected Bacalar from constant attacks by pirates.

Below left. This cannon in the fort of San Felipe seems to be awaiting a pirate attack.



Monument to the Mexican flag in Chetumal.



Temple of the Masks in Kohunlich, showing how Maya art combined sculpture and architecture in a balanced whole.

Right. Stucco mask of the Sun god, one of the main deities worshipped in Kohunlich.

KOHUNLICH

Because of its style of architecture the name of a particular geographical area has been given to a whole region in south Campeche and Quintana Roo. The ceremonial centers of Becan, Chicanná, Xpuhil, Payán and Kohunlich are the most outstanding examples of the "Rio Bec" style.

The architecture of this region is a combination of the Guatemalan Petén style immediately to the south, and the northern Chenes style.

Explorations were begun in Kohunlich in 1972, and the data obtained by archaeologists shows that the site was occupied continuously from 300 B.C. to the 13th century. The most important complexes on the site are the Temple of the Sun Gods and the Square of the Stelae. The Temple was built in the 5th century A.D. on a natural rise; its stairway is flanked by eight striking stuc-

co masks personifying the Sun which were originally painted red. Six of them are severely damaged, but the other two are perfect. Each mask is different, but all wear a complicated headdress suggesting a mythological being. They have nose plugs and a T shaped dental mutilation representing the hieroglyph Ik, closely related with Sun symbols. The glyph "Chuen", related to the Maya sacred calendar of 260 days is engraved on the eyes of the masks.

The Square of the Stelae is another important architectural complex at Kohunlich. It takes its name from one of the buildings whose stairway is decorated with four monolithic stelae, probably carved in the 13th century, which must have had some religious purpose.

There are more than 10 hectares of paving at Kohunlich, showing that the whole city must have been paved. The purpose of this seems to have been to collect rainwater for storage, since water is scarce in the region.







Near the modern resort of Cancún is the beautiful Isla Mujeres.

ISLA MUJERES

In 1502, Christopher Columbus made his fourth voyage to the lands he had discovered. His fleet was anchored off the island of Guanaja when a huge canoe approached it. The natives indicated that there were vast expanses of densely populated land farther west. These natives, Mayas without a doubt, were telling the Spanish about the Yucatán Peninsula. Columbus paid little attention to this news because he had other aims, but Antón de Alaminos, who was on this voyage as cabin boy, never forgot this important information. In 1517 the Governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez, ordered Captain Francisco Hernández de Córdoba to find new lands where natives could be captured for work in the Greater Antilles. He made up a small fleet of three vessels, with Antón de Alaminos as pilot, who directed the ships

westward. After sailing for 21 days the fleet discovered Isla Mujeres on March 1, 1517. The island, 7 kilometers long and 1 kilometer wide, was given its name because of the large number of statues found there. The great majority of these are of women and are perhaps related to some fertility cult, though they could also represent Ix Chel, goddess of the Moon and patroness of weavers. A one roomed temple and observatory dedicated to her stands at the southern end of the island. From Isla Mujeres the Spaniards could see the coast of Yucatán, which had not been found by Europeans until then. The discovery caused great excitement in Cuba since this was a new land, with a refined civilization, and the Spaniards supposed that the inhabitants lived in large cities full of unimaginable treasure.





The main square on Isla Mujeres reflects the island's peacefulness.

Above left. Aerial view of Isla Mujeres in the Mexican Caribbean.



Below left. The ferry, decorated with colorful balloons, ready to take visitors round the island.

Enchanting traditional corners welcome the visitor.



The wide variety of handicrafts will help the visitor remember this beautiful island in the Caribbean.



Many craftsmen on Isla Mujeres are inspired by ancient Maya designs.

After its discovery, ships crossing the Caribbean stopped at Isla Mujeres for provisions, mainly taking on water, salt and lime.

Today the island is a world famous resort, known for its natural beauty such as "Cocoteros" and "Lancheros" beaches or the underwater reserve of El Garrafón. Skin diving is popular everywhere, and for experts there is the visit to the caves where shark sleep for long periods, filmed by Jacques Cousteau in one of his most important documentaries.

The population is approximately 14,000, whose deep



Cocoteris, one of the lovely beaches on Isla Mujeres.

Boat trips are an unforgettable way of visitinng the island.

roots in the island help to give local festivities a more traditional flavor than in other resorts in the region. Carnival, for instance, in February and March is especially popular for its liveliness and color; the finish of the international regatta "Amigos de Sol a Sol" at the end of April is celebrated with a series of events; and the religious festivals of La Concepción (Dec. 1st - 8th) and the one in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Dec. 12th) give the islanders the opportunity to show their traditional hospitality.





Sea and reefs at the "Garrafón de Castilla", near the National Park of El Garrafon, Isla Mujeres.



Aerial view of the island of Contoy, a refuge for local and migratory sea-birds.

THE ISLAND OF CONTOY

The island of Contoy, 6.17 kilometers long and only 20 meters wide at its narrowest point is a nature reserve where a large variety of sea-birds live and breed. Contoy, one hour by launch from Isla Mujeres was declared a National Wildlife Reserve in February 1961. More than 70 species of birds live there, including such beauties as spoonbills or pink cranes, crested cranes, white ibises, frigate birds, brown pelicans, terns, and occasionally flamingoes, sharing the island with various species of turtles (white, hawksbill, green and leather-back), striped iguanas, lizards and boas, and with numberless blue, spider hermit and horseshoe crabs (the last



Watchtower on the island of Contoy, an hour by launch from Isla Mujeres. More than 70 species of birds live on this splendid reserve.

Brown pelican, one of the many species on Contoy.



of these a sort of living fossil species 200 million years old).

There are numerous lagoons on the island: Norte, Pajarera Norte, Muerta, Pajarera Central, Pajarera del Sur and the largest, Puerto Viejo, which was never settled because of the lack of freshwater, and now the refuge of many wild species. Today the island has a biological research station with a 15 meter observation tower from which the famous wildlife can be watched. Conservation is the responsibility of permanent custodians and of the scientists working there. Visitors are welcome in the daytime, and a small ecology museum has been built next to the jetty to encourage respect for wildlife.



Panoramic view of Cozumel, an important resort in the Mexican Caribbean.

Above right. Ferries connect the island of Cozumel with the mainland.

Below right. A pause during a stroll through Cozumel's streets.

COZUMEL

Following the discoveries of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba in 1517 the Governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez organized an expedition in 1518, led by Juan de Grijalva. The fleet of four ships carried Pedro de Alvarado, Francisco de Montejo, Gil González de Avila and Antón de Alaminos, who were to go down in history for their part in the conquest of Mexico. Accompanying these soldiers as chaplain was Juan Díaz who, according to some historians "greatly astonished the natives" when he celebrated the first mass on the recently discovered island.

The Island of Swallows, or Cozumel, was named Isla de Santa Cruz by Grijalva because it was discovered on May 3rd., the Day of the Holy Cross. The name was never popular however, and was soon abandoned in favor of Cozumel.

Cozumel is 40 kilometers long and 16 kilometers wide. During the pre-Hispanic period it was an important religious and commercial center, particularly in the Late Classic (600 - 800 A.D.), where goods were transferred between land and sea routes. It was first settled in the Late pre-Classic, and continuously inhabited until 1519, as various archaeological studies have shown.

Cozumel was not an isolated outpost of the Maya world but was linked to other important Mesoamerican cultures by intense trading traffic over the channel that separates it from the mainland, as archaeological remains have proved.

Hernán Cortés put in here with his fleet in 1519 before embarking on the conquest of Mexico, and in 1527 it served Francisco de Montejo as a base for his first, unsuccessful attempt to conquer Yucatán. During colo-









The sea around Cozumel is ideal for skin diving.

The lovely quiet beaches of Cozumel.

Preceding pages. A walk along Cozumel's seafront is pleasant at any time.

al times it was the refuge of such pirates as Drake and Laffitte who caused the Spanish crown so much trouble and gave birth to the legend of fabulous treasures being buried there.

Today Cozumel is world famous for its resort complexes, begun in the 50s, and for its natural attractions. Among these is the lagoon of Chancanab with its unique reef, home to more than 60 species of tropical fish which can be watched easily from the shore, and also its botanical garden with rare tropical and subtropical plants from both the American continent and other parts of the world. Thanks to this garden, which completely surrounds the lagoon, this is one of the most charming places in all Quintana Roo.

The numerous beaches and reefs offer a wide range of water sports, with skin diving as the most popular. San Juan, Maya, San Francisco, San Martín and Chun Chacab are just some of the many beaches. The most popular reefs are Paraíso Norte, Paraíso Sur, Chancanab, Yocab and Tunich.

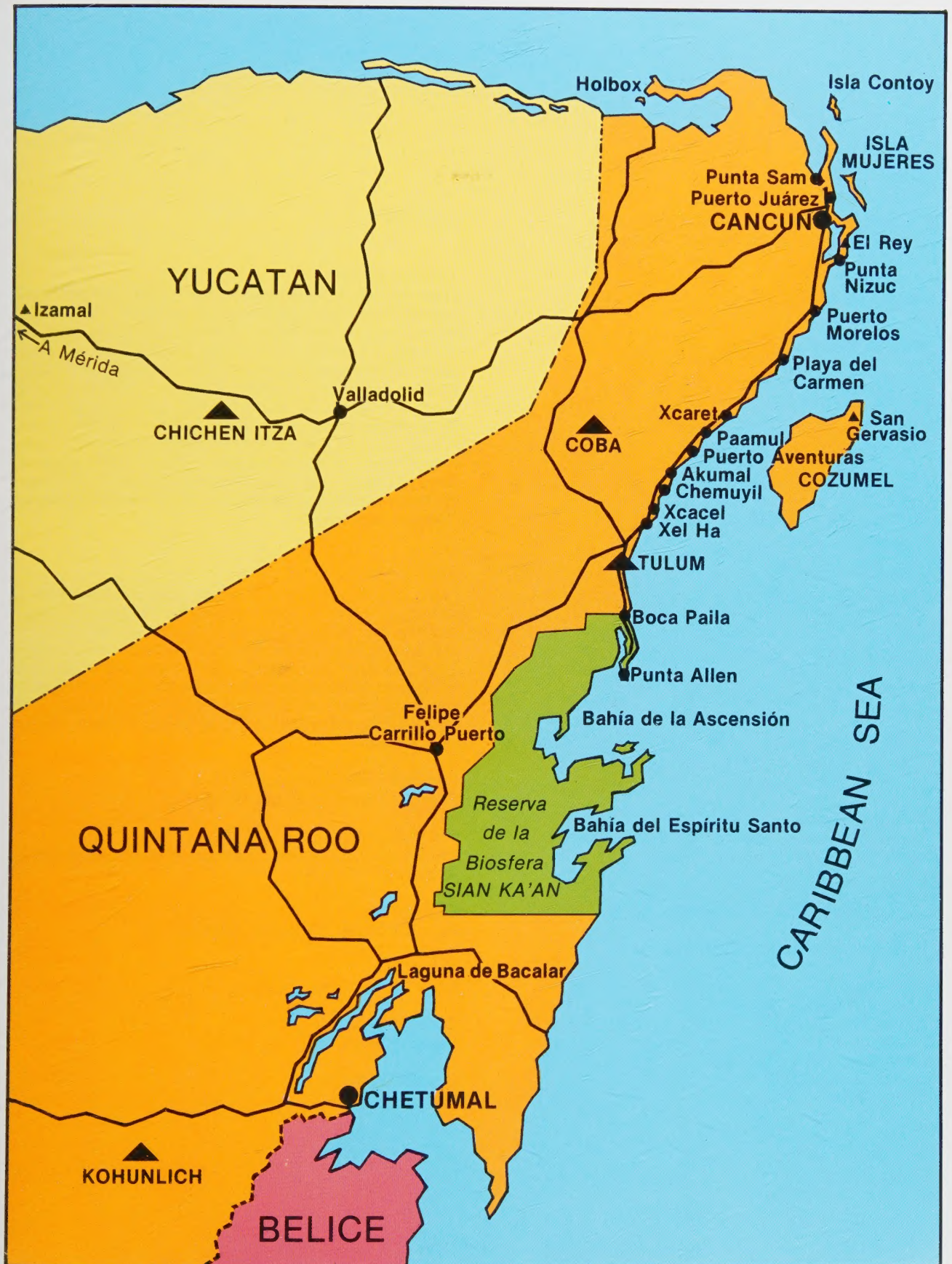
For those interested in archaeology, San Gervasio in the north central part of the island is the most important of the sites that have been explored. Excavations at San Gervasio have brought to light six groups of interesting buildings. In one of the nine buildings making up the first three groups are some very well preserved murals, vaults, mass burials, platforms, dwelling units, altars and tombs which are well worth visiting.

Following pages. Temple and arch on the archaeological site of San Gervasio, Cozumel, that contains the oldest known remains of the Maya culture.

The lagoon of Chacanab, surrounded by botanical gardens, is like a natural aquarium, and its reef is the home of a wide variety of colorful fish.







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